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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by Disabled Peoples' International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. Disabled Peoples' International has found that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have led to very little improvement in the lives of women with disabilities around the world, particularly in developing countries. While article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an important step forward, there is much that remains to be done to ensure that women and girls with disabilities fully exercise and enjoy human rights. The following statement is divided into two parts, covering information about the situation of women with disabilities and key recommendations for change.

A. Situation of women with disabilities

2. The following information has been gathered by Disability Rights Promotion International and its partner organizations of persons with disabilities in India and Kenya. The organization is an international collaborative project working to develop tools and build capacity to monitor the rights of persons with disabilities. The information is based on both legal and policy research along with face-to-face interviews conducted with women and men with disabilities in the countries concerned. While the information presented here is not exhaustive, it outlines trends identified on this research. Disabled Peoples' International supports the aims of this project and has agreed to assist Disability Rights Promotion International and its partners by submitting this monitoring data to the fifteen-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Disabled Peoples' International finds that the trends identified in India and Kenya are very similar to the experiences of women with disabilities in other countries in which it works.

India

3. In India, Disability Rights Promotion International worked with Swadhikaar Centre for Disabilities Information, Research and Resource Development, the Asmita Resource Centre for Women, the NALSAR School of Law and the National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped.

4. The 2001 Indian census estimated that there were over 9 million women with disabilities in India. Some researchers estimate that there are over 35 million women with disabilities (Bacquer and Sharma 1997). Others put the figure at 20 million, of whom 98 per cent are illiterate; less than 1 per cent of whom have access to health care and rehabilitation services (ActionAid 2003). The majority of women with disabilities in India suffer the triple discrimination of being female, disabled and poor. Not only are they socially invisible but their plight is worse than both men with disabilities and women without disabilities. Being powerless, isolated and anonymous, women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to abuse and violence.

5. While no specific disability law in India mentions women as a group requiring special attention, the eleventh five-year plan (2007-2012) produced by the Government of India's Planning Commission observed that "Women with disabilities are considered a financial burden and social liability by their families; denied opportunities of mobility and access to education; viewed as asexual, helpless and dependant; ... and are isolated and neglected with no hope of a normal life." The plan also stated that the specific concerns of women with disabilities have

found a place neither in the government policies and programmes nor the voluntary sector. For the first time, in the eleventh plan, the situation of women with disabilities was considered in all its complexity, including the need for an intersectional understanding of discrimination in order for policy to be effective and addressing the vulnerability of poor women to triple discrimination, based on poverty, gender and disability, in significant ways. The plan explored ways in which the gender-based division of labour places women with disabilities at an additional disadvantage, both at the family and community levels. These concerns are also addressed in the national policy for persons with disabilities, although not as comprehensively as in the planning document. The plan provides a framework for future Government and non-governmental action to strengthen the position of women with disabilities.

6. In addition, the Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Women for the eleventh Plan of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, recommends that women with disabilities be included not only as beneficiaries of gender equity but also as fieldworkers, project facilitators, survey designers and field investigators in projects with disability components in order to enhance their visibility in positive roles. It challenges negative attitudes that reduce women with disabilities to helpless objects of pity. The report proposes that there be a separate wing for women with disabilities in the Disability Commissioner's office and that women with disabilities be represented on the central and State coordination and executive committees.

7. The Indian partner organizations of Disability Rights Promotion International conducted 113 interviews with persons with various types of impairments (47 women, 66 men) in three monitoring sites in Andhra Pradesh State: Hyderabad, Kurnool and the villages of three Mandals of the Visakhapatnam District. The interviews revealed a gender pattern in experiences of discrimination among people with disabilities in India. Women interviewed faced the double discrimination of being women, as well as being women with disabilities. Women with disabilities reported facing more discrimination from their family members and in society than men, perhaps because they are discriminated against twice over, due to patriarchy and dependence. Men with disabilities reported facing the most discrimination from the Government and society. Both women and men with disabilities reported exclusion in communication and access to the physical environment.

Kenya

8. In Kenya, Disability Rights Promotion International worked with the African Union of the Blind, the Kenya Union of the Blind, the Centre for Disability Rights, Education and Advocacy and the University of Nairobi.

9. The 1997 report of the Task Force Reviewing the laws relating to persons with disabilities explicitly emphasized the need to recognize the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women and girls in Kenya. The report recommended that special legal, policy and institutional mechanisms for addressing the specific forms of discrimination faced by women and girls be adopted in the new legal and policy regime for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. However, neither the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2003 nor the draft national policy recognize the multiple disadvantages women with disabilities face.

10. The partners of Disability Rights Promotion International in Kenya conducted 94 interviews with persons with various types of impairments (49 women, 45 men) in three monitoring sites: Nairobi, Nyanza and the Rift Valley. The majority of people interviewed, both women and men, thought that gender was not significant in terms of the discrimination faced by people with disabilities in Kenya. Yet, more women (32 per cent) than men (18 per cent) reported that being both female and having a disability represented a double disadvantage because of discrimination faced as women and as a person with a disability. The findings may reflect the possibility that the status of disability is an even greater barrier to people than gender, although, on a day by day basis, dual discrimination does have an impact.

11. In the workplace, people with disabilities in Kenya reported that they were exposed to numerous situations in which their rights were violated. More than 25 per cent of respondents reported specific incidences of abuse and violence in the workplace. The mistreatment of people with disabilities was reported in nearly all places of work, including domestic work. Many women reported working as maids for months without being paid. Also, some women reported sexual abuse and rape in the workplace.

12. Data gathered through the interviews showed that traditional views portraying women in the family as dependent and submissive to men increase the vulnerability of women with disabilities to discrimination. Incidences of abuse and violence were more common for women with disabilities than for women without disabilities. These incidences were also reported to occur most often in the domestic sphere, perpetrated by parents, partners and siblings. Men with disabilities, in contrast, were more likely to experience discriminatory attitudes and barriers to access in the public sphere — in their workplaces, communities and while interacting with their peers without disabilities in multiple social settings. This could be a result of men with disabilities being more likely to be outside, and women more like to be inside, the home.

B. Recommendations for change

13. All countries should ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol without reservation and should immediately fulfil their obligations thereunder, including those set out in article 6 of the Convention.

14. All countries, non-governmental organizations, funders and other development actors should ensure that women with disabilities are active participants in all development processes and programmes, including by holding key decision-making roles.